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ABSTRACT

The best way to get started in conducting measurement research in creative drama is to understand creative drama as fully as possible in order to discover significant issues that need the kind of clarification that measurement research can provide. A few basic research questions that will help people focus on particular projects in creative drama research include the following: (1) What do various kinds of children naturally do when involved in the activity of creative drama? (2) How can the discipline of creative drama serve to broaden, enhance, and enrich the behaviors of various kinds of children in the most efficient manner possible? and (3) What effect does this participation in creative drama have on other activities or behaviors? Once a research question has been formulated, the researcher must choose a standard format for measurement study in creative drama. Depending on the nature of the question selected, researchers can choose the classic experimental model or the observational approach. (RL)

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GETTING STARTED WITH MEASUREMENT RESEARCH IN CREATIVE DRAMA

by
Gil Lazier

Once on a brisk clear morning, God and the Devil were taking a stroll together, casually discussing issues of mutual concern. As they approached a clearing, a shiny object lying on the ground caught God's attention and he stopped to pick it up. As God held this exquisitely beautiful glistening thing in his hand, the Devil asked, "What is that thing you've got there?" God smiled and responded, "It's a piece of the truth." With a sinister gleam in his eye the Devil grabbed the object out of God's hand and said, "Here, let me organize it for you."

This little anecdote should not be interpreted as an outright condemnation of organizational process, but rather as a gentle caution. For measurement research, the subject of this essay, is based upon the assumption that we can get closer to an understanding of that shiny thing that God picks up, we can begin to understand the truth better, through rigorous organization. Hopefully this story about God and the Devil does not really apply to the measurement researcher (although I know a few who can get pretty devilish at times). But a major danger of measurement research, as the parable suggests, is the tendency to get carried away with the organizations, the techniques of measuring, to the point at which the truth becomes obscured.

Measurement research should be viewed always as a means to discover truth about a part of life. It is a tool to be applied to make things clearer. If that is the case, then the best way to get started in measurement research in creative drama or any other discipline is to study the field, decide first what areas need to be clarified, and then which of these areas lend themselves to the particular kind of organi-

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zation inherent in the method. After these decisions are made, the rest is simply a creative process of discovering just the right way to organize the inquiry, designing a system of taking measurements, and finally analyzing the results as they relate to the field. So the first thing to do to get started with measurement research in creative drama is to understand creative drama as fully as possible from the inside in order to discover significant issues which cry out for the kind of clarification which measurement research can provide.

Obviously, some knowledge of the processes of measurement research is necessary in order to understand what the tools can and cannot do. There are many questions that this form of research cannot answer directly and limitations imposed by the research techniques themselves. The tools dictate how the questions must be asked (see Kerlinger, 1964, pp. 3-17, for a concise approach to this issue). These caveats, however, can be learned fairly easily by some formal study in empirical technique.

Motivation is also very important. The would-be researcher should be prompted to engage in measurement study from a conviction that it is the very best way to contribute to the discipline. Otherwise, why do it? If the impetus is to write articles to get promotions or to be known in the field, or to get a doctorate, there might be easier ways of accomplishing those goals. But if the desire is to help clarify actual behavior in creative drama in a manner which is objective, systematic, and can be generalized beyond a one case situation (see Holsti, 1969, pp. 3-5), then by all means it's time to get on with the research.

There are some very sound arguments for using measurement research especially in the discipline of creative drama. The discipline has been traditionally linked to the larger context of child development in which the prevalent research

models involve measurement of behavior. Measurement research is employed in that field, and presents a language that child development experts expect. Closely connected with this fact is the practical reality that measurement research lends a scientific respectability to creative drama which is impressive when it becomes time to solicit financial support for projects. Many funding agencies demand measurement data to demonstrate the effectiveness of improvisational children's drama, especially when it is viewed as a pedagogical tool to accelerate learning in other areas such as reading and mathematics. Also, many actual practices of creative drama lend themselves to measurement study, which often codes and counts observable behavior in some way (see Lazier, 1977, pp. 157-159, for one example). The activities of creative drama demand overt behavior from the participants. Thus, it is relatively easy to measure behavior patterns in the field.

In order to get started then, look for a project in the discipline which must be done. That search can be aided by asking a few basic research questions which speak to the entire universe of developmental drama. Such questions have been very helpful to me in my own research activities in the recent past. They are:

1. What do various kinds of children naturally do when involved in the activity of creative drama?
2. How can the behaviors of various kinds of children be broadened or enhanced or enriched in the most efficient manner possible, within the discipline of creative drama?
3. What effect does this participation in creative drama have on other activities or behaviors?

The first question has to do with a very basic and simple issue. What do kids of

various ages and backgrounds naturally do when given the tasks of creative drama? How do they naturally respond? Is it appropriate to generalize to expect certain kinds of behaviors from certain kinds of children (such questions are addressed in Lazier, et.al., 1973)? There are incredible implications of this one basic question and almost no measurement research available on it. Leading texts on creative drama make developmental claims concerning what various age groups of children will do in improvisations, what activities are appropriate to various ages, what should be expected of boys and girls. In fact, more than one widely used text in the field is organized into chapters according to child age (Lazier, et.al., 1971, pp. 155-156). Measurement research could be tremendously useful in this one area alone.

The second question, "How can child behavior in creative drama be enhanced most efficiently?" relates to instruction in two fundamental ways. First, it asks which of the overall systems for teaching creative drama are more or less effective under differing conditions. Second, it explores the most efficient ways of using any one of these overall systems to accelerate positive behavior.

The third question takes us outside creative drama per se because it looks upon CD techniques as tools to increase other learning potentials, cognitive skills, for example. It asks whether, how, to what extent experiences in creative drama accelerate learning in general. Since the mid 1960's, there has been growing interest in this question. At first extravagant but unsubstantiated claims were made for the effectiveness of improvisations as learning tools. Then educational and psychological theory, such as that of Piaget, was used to support these claims. More recently, a few measurement studies have begun to provide "hard" support

for the claims (examples are Karioth, 1970, and Tucker, 1971). Obviously much more work must be done in this area.

If this approach to the discovery of research questions seems workable, or if another approach leads to a specific problem, it might be useful to understand that there are a few standard formats for measurement study in the creative drama field: the classic experimental model and what might be called the taxonomic or observational approach. The experimental orientation is somewhat removed from real life situations because it necessitates the isolation of a few variables so that they can be manipulated by a researcher. The results of these manipulations, their effects, are coded, studied, and generalizations are made. Rigorous controls are necessary. Interest in, for example, whether or not a particular form of creative drama increases scores on a sixth grade reading test might lead to the standard experimental design process of matching some groups of sixth graders, controlling their reading instruction, using a particular form of CD with only one group, and comparing scores on a reading test. In this manner, the experimental approach could ascertain the probability of whether or not creative drama significantly affected the scores.

The other approach to measurement design is a bit more suited to the state of learning in the field. Taxonomic or observational measurement research does not necessitate such rigorous controls. It does not require the investigator to manipulate variables. It attempts to avoid tampering with the naturalness of the phenomena studied. It does call for the development of non-obtrusive, systematic observation procedures which can be coded numerically. In creative drama, the taxonomic or observational approach asks the question, "How can a real-life, authentic creative drama situation be observed non-obtrusively in such a way as

to categorize the content and measure behavior in the categories, so that it can be summarized and compared?" My own work has moved along these lines and has used careful study of video-taped creative drama sessions. Both approaches, the experimental and observational, can be very useful, depending on the kinds of questions asked.

I am eager to encourage all who have interest in developmental drama and systematic research to combine the two. The more work of this kind which is done, the more accurate information we will have to help us. Ultimately that information contributes to the growth of our children. Research involving measurement principles and techniques is especially useful because of its precision. If it is done well, we can be relatively confident that we can follow the advice provided by it.

At the same time, there are always dangers in the application of measurement procedures to any field, especially areas connected to artistic and emotional expression. Measurement research is by definition reductive and necessitates a conversion process whereby the real is observed, categorized, labeled, coded, and measured. The results of the measurements are then interpreted by re-converting them back to a real-life context. This entire system has a beauty and clarity of its own. It is efficient and, within its own parameters, is very honest. But as each of these steps is taken, the path can easily lead away from the natural toward the artificial. Considerable energy must be expended to remain at every step as close to the actual, the authentic as possible. Otherwise, measurement research can degenerate into an intricate exercise in the manipulation of jargon and numbers.

Measurement research then in creative drama can be of great benefit by giving us some honest and accurate answers to the substantive questions in the field.

If you are knowledgeable in the subject area and interested in measurement, you are ready to begin. Just remember, when you see that exquisitely beautiful glistening object in God's hand and want to figure out what it's all about, one very efficient approach is to take some measurements. But be careful to keep your eyes on the object more than the yardstick. That way you're sure to stay in touch with the truth!

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